

APPENDIX C
THUNDER BASIN NATIONAL GRASSLAND
LAND AND RESOURCE MANAGEMENT PLAN
2001 REVISION

ROCKY MOUNTAIN REGION
USDA FOREST SERVICE

AMENDMENT 2009-3

MODIFICATION OF MANAGEMENT DIRECTION TO PRAIRIE DOG PLAN
AMENDMENT ON THUNDER BASIN NATIONAL GRASSLAND

Digest: Modifies Management Direction to a more site specific implementation plan and modifies the black-footed ferret reintroduction area on Thunder Basin National Grassland, Wyoming.

Reason for Amendment

This amendment to the *Thunder Basin National Grassland Land and Resource Management Plan, 2001 Revision (LRMP)*, would approve a full suite of tools to manage prairie dogs, modify the area of black-footed ferret reintroduction, and adjust shooting restriction boundaries on the Thunder Basin National Grassland (TBNG), Wyoming.

The Forest Service analyzed and prepared an Environmental Impact Statement for this proposal. This analysis concluded that there was a need for the diversification in management tools, adjustment of shooting restrictions and Black-footed Ferret Reintroduction Habitat (Management Area 3.63) on the TBNG. It also concluded that approval of the project on TBNG would be inconsistent, in some instances, with the standards and guidelines in the LRMP. The LRMP provides guidance for all resource management activities on National Forest Land. They provide management direction, standards, and guidelines, describe resource management practices, and identify overall availability and suitability of lands for resource management. Project level analyses, on the other hand, determine if a proposal is, or can be made consistent with LRMP direction and guidance. Projects that cannot comply with direction in the LRMP must be found inconsistent with management direction, unless the direction is modified through amendment. In the later case, strategy approval and management plan amendment can be done simultaneously.

This strategy will include all management and geographic areas on the Thunder Basin National Grasslands.

Standards to be amended

This amendment to Plan Standards is made for those lands included in the Final Environmental Impact Statement and Record of Decision for the Plan Amendment for Prairie Dog Management.

“Standards are actions that must be followed or are required limits to activities in order to achieve Grassland objectives. Site-specific deviations from standards must be analyzed and documented in management plan amendments.” LRMP page 1-9.

ALTERNATIVES 2 and 5

Chapter 1, Standards and Guidelines

Two (2) Grassland-wide Standards and 1 guideline are amended by waiving the Standard/guideline to allow for approval of a full suite of tools to manage prairie dogs, modify the area of black-footed ferret reintroduction, and adjust the shooting closure boundary. Site-specific direction from the project, where it applies, will be used instead.

#1. Chapter 1, F-21. Current. Any net loss of suitable black-footed ferret habitat as a result of prairie dog **poisoning** or development of new facilities within colonies shall be replaced within the year. This is based on the amount of suitable habitat available prior to prairie dog dispersal in the year of the **poisoning** or development. Standard

Need for Change

As part of being a good neighbor, aggressive management actions will be taken to achieve LRMP objectives and minimize conflicts with adjacent landowners. We will accelerate black-footed ferret reintroduction and active management of unwanted prairie dog colonization by applying appropriate tools. Prairie dog conservation plans developed by the states will be consulted for the appropriate response to unwanted colonization onto adjacent non-federal lands. This alternative plans to control prairie dogs by poisoning without replacing these populations.

Revision

Chapter 1, F-21. Any net loss of suitable black-footed ferret habitat as a result of development of new facilities within colonies shall be replaced within the year. This is based on the amount of suitable habitat available prior to prairie dog dispersal in the year of the development. Standard.

#2 Chapter 1, H-1. Current. 1. **Prohibit** the use of rodenticides (grain baits) for reducing prairie dog populations to the following situations:

- Public health and safety risks occur in the immediate area,
 - Damage to private and public facilities, such as cemeteries and residences.
- Standard

Need for Change

Increases the situations where poison can be used.

As part of being a good neighbor, aggressive management actions will be taken to achieve LRMP objectives and minimize conflicts with adjacent landowners. We will accelerate black-footed ferret reintroduction and active management of unwanted prairie dog colonization by applying appropriate tools. Prairie dog conservation plans developed

by the states will be consulted for the appropriate response to unwanted colonization onto adjacent non-federal lands.

Implement a project-level and site-specific implementation strategy to manage prairie dogs using the full spectrum of management tools to maintain viable populations to support black-footed ferret reintroduction and populations of other associated species while reducing unwanted colonization of prairie dogs on adjoining lands along national grassland boundaries.

Revision

Chapter 1, H-1. 1. **Limit** the use of rodenticides (grain baits) for reducing prairie dog populations to the following situations:

- Public health and safety risks occur in the immediate area,
 - Damage to private and public facilities, such as cemeteries and residences.
 - **On prairie dog colonies that are expanding on to neighboring private lands where they are not wanted.**
 - **Colonies outside Categories 1, 2, 3, and 4 (as identified in strategy, LRMP Appendix #) if the Forest Service determines they are not needed for habitat for prairie dogs, black-footed ferrets or other associated species.**
- Standard

#3. Chapter 1, H-2. Current. Consult state-wide prairie dog conservation strategies for additional guidance on the appropriate response to complaints of unwanted prairie dog colonization on adjoining agricultural lands (private, state, and tribal lands).

Guideline

Need for Change

The replacement would increase the use of management tools and adds the state agencies name. This provides a full spectrum of tools for prairie dog management and sideboards on their use.

Implement a project-level and site-specific implementation strategy to manage prairie dogs using the full spectrum of management tools to maintain viable populations to support black-footed ferret reintroduction and populations of other associated species while reducing unwanted colonization of prairie dogs on adjoining lands along national grassland boundaries.

Replacement

Chapter 1, H-2. **In Consultation with the Wyoming Game and Fish Department, determine the appropriate response to complaints of unwanted colonization on adjoining private and state lands. A spectrum of management tools will be considered based on site-specific evaluations.**

Guideline

Chapter 2, Geographic area

There are 2 Desired Conditions, one for Broken Hills GA and one for Cellars Rosecrans GA, that are amended by the decision on this project. Site-specific direction from the project, where it applies, will be used instead.

#4. Chapter 2, Broken Hills Geographic Area. Current.

Management Area Prescription Allocation

| Number | Prescription | Acres |
|--------|--|---------------|
| 1.31 | Backcountry Recreation Nonmotorized | 6,545 |
| 2.1 | Special Interest Area | 14,170 |
| 3.63 | Black-footed Ferret Reintroduction Habitat | 13,619 |
| 3.65 | Rangelands with Diverse Natural- Appearing Landscapes | 71,100 |
| 3.68 | Big Game Range | 18,426 |
| 5.12 | General Forest and Rangeland | 33,577 |

As shown on the map for the LRMP, which is a part of the LRMP

Need for Change

Adds 132 acres to MA 3.63 and deletes 132 acres from MA 3.65 in the Broken Hills GA. The replacement amends the LRMP to support the site-specific management strategy and to modify the boundary of Black-footed Ferret Reintroduction Habitat (Management Area 3.63). The modification of the boundary black-footed ferret reintroduction habitat boundary is proposed to provide a more logical boundary for prairie dog colonies based upon topographical and biological barriers and includes lands recently acquired through land exchange.

Revision

Chapter 2, Broken Hills Geographic Area, Management Area Prescription Allocation

| Number | Prescription | Acres |
|--------|--|---------------|
| 1.31 | Backcountry Recreation Nonmotorized | 6,545 |
| 2.1 | Special Interest Area | 14,170 |
| 3.63 | Black-footed Ferret Reintroduction Habitat | 13,751 |
| 3.65 | Rangelands with Diverse Natural- Appearing Landscapes | 70,968 |
| 3.68 | Big Game Range | 18,426 |
| 5.12 | General Forest and Rangeland | 33,577 |

As shown on Appendix C-map

#5 Chapter 2, Cellars Rosecrans Geographic Area. Current.
Management Area Prescription Allocation

| Number | Prescription | Acres |
|--------|--|---------------|
| 2.1 | Special Interest Area | 6,940 |
| 2.2 | Research Natural Areas | 1,213 |
| 3.63 | Black-footed Ferret Reintroduction Habitat | 34,275 |
| 3.68 | Big Game Range | 6 |
| 5.12 | General Forest and Rangeland | 78,647 |

As shown on the map for the LRMP, which is a part of the LRMP

Need for Change

Adds 234 acres to MA 3.63 and deletes 234 acres from the Cellars Rosecrans GA. Amending the LRMP to support the site-specific management strategy and to modify the boundary of Black-footed Ferret Reintroduction Habitat (Management Area 3.63). The modification of the boundary black-footed ferret reintroduction habitat boundary is proposed to provide a more logical boundary for prairie dog colonies based upon topographical and biological barriers and includes lands recently acquired through land exchange.

Revision

Chapter 2, Cellars Rosecrans Geographic Area
Management Area Prescription Allocation

| Number | Prescription | Acres |
|--------|--|---------------|
| 2.1 | Special Interest Area | 6,940 |
| 2.2 | Research Natural Areas | 1,213 |
| 3.63 | Black-footed Ferret Reintroduction Habitat | 34,509 |
| 3.68 | Big Game Range | 6 |
| 5.12 | General Forest and Rangeland | 78,413 |

As shown on Appendix C- Map.

Chapter 3. Management Areas

There is one change in Chapter 3 Management Area Direction. One 3.63 Management Area Standard is amended by revising the Standard allow for approval of a full suite of tools to manage prairie dogs, modify the area of black-footed ferret reintroduction, and adjust the shooting restriction boundary.

#6. Chapter 3, Management Area 3.63, General – 1. Current. Authorize only those uses and activities that do not reduce the suitability of the area as black-footed ferret reintroduction habitat. Standard

Need for Change

Adds habitat below the level needed to support long-term sustainable, and do not authorized uses that would prevent this.

Prairie dog management continues to be an important and controversial subject on Thunder Basin. The Forest Service has an obligation under the ESA to enhance the recovery of endangered species like the black-footed ferret and maintain viable populations of sensitive species and species that may be impacted by Forest Service management. Many of these species are associated with prairie dog colonies whose extent changes under the influence of ungulate grazing, drought, disease, and poisoning.

Revision

Chapter 3, Management Area 3.63, General – 1. Authorize only those uses and activities **in the reintroduction area** that do not reduce **habitat below the level needed to support a long-term sustainable** black-footed ferret population.

Until habitat is available to support a long-term sustainable black-footed ferret population, do not authorize uses and activities that would prevent annual increases in the prairie dog population. Standard

ALTERNATIVE 3

Chapter 1, Standards and Guidelines

One Grassland-wide Standard is amended by waiving the Standard to allow for approval of a full suite of tools to manage prairie dogs, modify the area of black-footed ferret reintroduction, and adjust the shooting restriction boundary. Site-specific direction from the project, where it applies, will be used instead.

#1 Chapter 1, H-1. Current. 1. **Prohibit** the use of rodenticides (grain baits) for reducing prairie dog populations to the following situations:

- Public health and safety risks occur in the immediate area,
 - Damage to private and public facilities, such as cemeteries and residences.
- Standard

Need for Change

Increases the situations where poison can be used.

As part of being a good neighbor, aggressive management actions will be taken to achieve LRMP objectives and minimize conflicts with adjacent landowners. We will accelerate black-footed ferret reintroduction and active management of unwanted prairie dog colonization by applying appropriate tools. Prairie dog conservation plans developed by the states will be consulted for the appropriate response to unwanted colonization onto adjacent non-federal lands.

Implement a project-level and site-specific implementation strategy to manage prairie dogs using the full spectrum of management tools to maintain viable populations to support black-footed ferret reintroduction and populations of other associated species while reducing unwanted colonization of prairie dogs on adjoining lands along national grassland boundaries.

Revision

Chapter 1, H-1. 1. **Limit** the use of rodenticides (grain baits) for reducing prairie dog populations to the following situations:

- Public health and safety risks occur in the immediate area,
- Damage to private and public facilities, such as cemeteries and residences.
- **Colonies within 1/2 mile of private land/National Grassland boundaries where encroachment onto neighboring lands is demonstrated.** Standard

Chapter 3, Management Areas

There are two changes in Chapter 3 Management Area Direction. Both in 3.63 Management Area Standard is amended by revising the Standard allow for approval of a full suite of tools to manage prairie dogs, modify the area of black-footed ferret reintroduction area modification, and adjust the shooting restriction boundary.

#2 Chapter 3, Management Area 3.63, General – 1. Current. Authorize only those uses and activities that do not reduce the suitability of the area as black-footed ferret reintroduction habitat. Standard

Need for Change

This alternative increases the controls of prairie dogs (on boundaries) due to the good neighbor policy of controlling encroaching animals on private land. Controlling the prairie dogs does not provide a stable population for the ferret re-introduction. The Forest Service is not trying to maintain suitable habitat here, so that standard was removed.

Revision

Standard removed with no replacement.

ALTERNATIVE 4

Chapter 1, Standards and Guidelines

Two (2) Grassland-wide Standards and 1 guideline are amended by waiving the Standard/guideline to allow for approval of a full suite of tools to manage prairie dogs, modify the area of black-footed ferret reintroduction, and adjust the shooting closure boundary. Site-specific direction from the project, where it applies, will be used instead.

#1. Chapter 1, F-21. Current. Any net loss of suitable black-footed ferret habitat as a result of prairie dog **poisoning** or development of new facilities within colonies shall be

replaced within the year. This is based on the amount of suitable habitat available prior to prairie dog dispersal in the year of the **poisoning** or development. Standard

Need for Change

As part of being a good neighbor, aggressive management actions will be taken to achieve LRMP objectives and minimize conflicts with adjacent landowners. We will accelerate black-footed ferret reintroduction and active management of unwanted prairie dog colonization by applying appropriate tools. Prairie dog conservation plans developed by the states will be consulted for the appropriate response to unwanted colonization onto adjacent non-federal lands. This alternative plans to control prairie dogs by poisoning without replacing these populations.

Revision

Chapter 1, F-21. Any net loss of suitable black-footed ferret habitat as a result of development of new facilities within colonies shall be replaced within the year. This is based on the amount of suitable habitat available prior to prairie dog dispersal in the year of the development. Standard.

#2 Chapter 1, H-1. Current. 1. **Prohibit the use of rodenticides (grain baits) for reducing prairie dog populations to the following situations:**

- Public health and safety risks occur in the immediate area,
 - Damage to private and public facilities, such as cemeteries and residences.
- Standard

Need for Change

Increases the situations where poison can be used.

As part of being a good neighbor, aggressive management actions will be taken to achieve LRMP objectives and minimize conflicts with adjacent landowners. We will accelerate black-footed ferret reintroduction and active management of unwanted prairie dog colonization by applying appropriate tools. Prairie dog conservation plans developed by the states will be consulted for the appropriate response to unwanted colonization onto adjacent non-federal lands.

Implement a site-specific strategy to manage prairie dogs using the full spectrum of management tools to maintain viable populations to support black-footed ferret reintroduction and populations of other associated species while reducing unwanted colonization of prairie dogs on adjoining lands along national grassland boundaries.

Revision

Chapter 1, H-1. 1. **Limit** the use of rodenticides (grain baits) for reducing prairie dog populations to the following situations:

- Public health and safety risks occur in the immediate area,

- Damage to private and public facilities, such as cemeteries and residences.
- Within ¼ mile of the boundary with neighboring private lands when prairie dog colonies are expanding on to neighboring private lands where they are not wanted.
- Rodenticide may be applied on no more than 5% of the existing active colony acreage, provided that active colony acreage is the same or higher than in the previous year.
- Rodenticide may not be applied anywhere on TBNG until there are 10,000 acres of active colonies within MA 3.63.**Standard**

#3. Chapter 1, H-2. Current. Consult state-wide prairie dog conservation strategies for additional guidance on the appropriate response to complaints of unwanted prairie dog colonization on adjoining **agricultural lands (private, state, and tribal lands).** Guideline

Need for Change

The replacement would increase the use of management tools and adds the state agencies name. This provides a full spectrum of tools for prairie dog management and sideboards on their use.

Implement a project-level and site-specific implementation strategy to manage prairie dogs using the full spectrum of management tools to maintain viable populations to support black-footed ferret reintroduction and populations of other associated species while reducing unwanted colonization of prairie dogs on adjoining lands along national grassland boundaries.

Replacement

Chapter 1, H-2. **In Consultation with the Wyoming Game and Fish Department, determine** the appropriate response to complaints of unwanted colonization on adjoining **private lands. A spectrum of management tools will be considered based on site-specific evaluations.** Guideline

Chapter 2, Geographic area

There are 2 Desired Conditions, one for Broken Hills GA and one for Cellars Rosecrans GA, that are amended by the decision on this project. Site-specific direction from the project, where it applies, will be used instead.

#4. Chapter 2, Broken Hills Geographic Area. Current.

Management Area Prescription Allocation

| Number | Prescription | Acres |
|---------------|--|---------------|
| 1.31 | Backcountry Recreation Nonmotorized | 6,545 |
| 2.1 | Special Interest Area | 14,170 |
| 3.63 | Black-footed Ferret Reintroduction Habitat | 13,619 |
| 3.65 | Rangelands with Diverse Natural- Appearing Landscapes | 71,100 |
| 3.68 | Big Game Range | 18,426 |
| 5.12 | General Forest and Rangeland | 33,577 |

As shown on the map for the LRMP, which is a part of the LRMP

Need for Change

Adds 8942 acres to MA 3.63 and deletes 8942 acres from MA 3.65 in the Broken Hills GA. The replacement amends the LRMP to support the site-specific management strategy and to modify the boundary of Black-footed Ferret Reintroduction Habitat (Management Area 3.63). The modification of the boundary black-footed ferret reintroduction habitat boundary is proposed to provide a more logical boundary for prairie dog colonies based upon topographical and biological barriers and includes lands recently acquired through land exchange.

Revision

Chapter 2, Broken Hills Geographic Area, Management Area Prescription Allocation

| Number | Prescription | Acres |
|---------------|--|---------------|
| 1.31 | Backcountry Recreation Nonmotorized | 6,545 |
| 2.1 | Special Interest Area | 14,170 |
| 3.63 | Black-footed Ferret Reintroduction Habitat | 22,561 |
| 3.65 | Rangelands with Diverse Natural- Appearing Landscapes | 62,158 |
| 3.68 | Big Game Range | 18,426 |
| 5.12 | General Forest and Rangeland | 33,577 |

As shown on Appendix C-map

#5 Chapter 2, Cellars Rosecrans Geographic Area. Current.
Management Area Prescription Allocation

| Number | Prescription | Acres |
|--------|--|---------------|
| 2.1 | Special Interest Area | 6,940 |
| 2.2 | Research Natural Areas | 1,213 |
| 3.63 | Black-footed Ferret Reintroduction Habitat | 34,275 |
| 3.68 | Big Game Range | 6 |
| 5.12 | General Forest and Rangeland | 78,647 |

As shown on the map for the LRMP, which is a part of the LRMP

Need for Change

Adds 579 acres to MA 3.63 and deletes 579 acres from MA 5.12 in the Cellars Rosecrans GA. Amending the LRMP to support the site-specific management strategy and to modify the boundary of Black-footed Ferret Reintroduction Habitat (Management Area 3.63). The modification of the boundary black-footed ferret reintroduction habitat boundary is proposed to provide a more logical boundary for prairie dog colonies based upon topographical and biological barriers and includes lands recently acquired through land exchange.

Revision

Chapter 2, Cellars Rosecrans Geographic Area
Management Area Prescription Allocation

| Number | Prescription | Acres |
|--------|--|---------------|
| 2.1 | Special Interest Area | 6,940 |
| 2.2 | Research Natural Areas | 1,213 |
| 3.63 | Black-footed Ferret Reintroduction Habitat | 34,854 |
| 3.68 | Big Game Range | 6 |
| 5.12 | General Forest and Rangeland | 78,068 |

As shown on Appendix C- Map.

Chapter 3. Management Areas

There is one change in Chapter 3 Management Area Direction. One 3.63 Management Area Standard is amended by revising the Standard allow for approval of a full suite of tools to manage prairie dogs, modify the area of black-footed ferret reintroduction, and adjust the shooting restriction boundary.

#6. Chapter 3, Management Area 3.63, General – 1. Current. Authorize only those uses and activities that do not reduce the suitability of the area as black-footed ferret reintroduction habitat. **Standard**

Need for Change

Adds habitat below the level needed to support long-term sustainable, and do not authorized uses that would prevent this.

Prairie dog management continues to be an important and controversial subject on Thunder Basin. The Forest Service has an obligation under the ESA to enhance the recovery of endangered species like the black-footed ferret and maintain viable populations of sensitive species and species that may be impacted by Forest Service management. Many of these species are associated with prairie dog colonies whose extent changes under the influence of ungulate grazing, drought, disease, and poisoning.

Revision

Chapter 3, Management Area 3.63, General – 1. Authorize only those uses and activities in **the reintroduction area** that do not reduce **habitat below the level needed to support a long-term sustainable** black-footed ferret population.

Until habitat is available to support a long-term sustainable black-footed ferret population, do not authorize uses and activities that would prevent annual increases in the prairie dog population. Standard

Applicability of Amendment

This amendment is applicable to the Thunder Basin National Grasslands. Where the project is inconsistent with existing management area standards and guidelines, an amendment was developed, to the extent practicable, to minimize impacts and effect compliance with the *Thunder Basin National Grassland Land and Resource Management Plan, 2001 Revision*, and all other applicable laws. Those lands not impacted by this project shall continue to be managed under the existing management prescriptions, standards and guidelines.

NEPA Evaluation and Plan Amendment Significance Determination Process

As part of the proposed plan amendment evaluation, a determination as to whether the proposed amendment is a significant or non-significant amendment to the current plan has been made and is documented in the project file.

This amendment is consistent with the *National Environmental Policy Act* (NEPA), 40 CFR parts 1500 to 1508, and Chapters 10 (06/29/04) and 20 (9/26/05) of FSH 1909.15. In addition, it has been determined that this amendment is a non-significant amendment under the criteria of the *National Forest Management Act*.

Mary Peterson
Forest Supervisor

Date

Medicine Bow-Routt National Forests and Thunder Basin National Grassland